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ABSTRACT

The Independent Study in the Humanities Fellowship program for teachers of grades 9-12 has been sponsored since 1983 by the Council for Basic Education under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The program awards $3,000 fellowships for summer study to outstanding teachers of English, foreign languages, history, and other humanities disciplines. These fellowships offer selected teachers eight weeks of concentrated independent study in subjects closely related to their teaching. The author offers 15 recommendations, based on his experience as a reviewer for the fellowships, for candidates submitting proposals. Among them are: (1) The entire proposal should be typed neatly and accurately; (2) The statement of purpose must be clear and precise; (3) Consider study projects of previous fellows; (4) Make sure the bibliography is well-researched; (5) Don't try to sell yourself as an expert in the study field; (6) Make sure the study topic is one that will help you with your present or future courses, but remember the fellowship may not be used solely for curriculum development; and (7) Make sure your project is feasible in an eight week period, and that it involves study. (JMK)

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INDEPENDENT STUDY IN THE HUMANITIES. A FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS OF GRADES 9-12. A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

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My purpose this afternoon is essentially threefold: firstly, to describe briefly the Independent Study in the Humanities program; secondly, to offer advice, based on my experience as a reviewer for the 1983 and 1984 programs, on how you can improve your chances of receiving a fellowship if you do apply; and finally, to attempt to answer any questions you may have, either about the application process or about possible independent study topics.[1]

I must emphasize that the continuation of the program beyond 1984 will depend on several factors, among them, future N.E.H. funding approved by Congress and the Administration. My comments, therefore, are predicated on the assumption--which may or may not be valid--that the program will be contined. Some of my suggestions, however, can apply as well to other fellowship programs available to secondary school teachers.[2]

The Independent Study in the Humanities fellowship program for teachers of grades 9-12 has been sponsored since 1983 by the Council for Basic Education under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. For those of you who are not familiar with the program, I can best summarize its aims and objectives by quoting directly from the application booklet:

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The program of Independent Study in the Humanities awards $3,000 fellowships for summer study to outstanding teachers of English, foreign languages, history, and other humanities disciplines in grades 9 through 12.

The program assumes, first, that the quality of students' learning depends largely on the quality of teaching in the classroom and, second, that even superior teachers need opportunities for concentrated study to revitalize their daily teaching.

Therefore, the principal purpose of this program is to encourage serious independent study in the humanities by individual teachers and, by improving teachers' knowledge of their subjects, to nourish the intellectual life of schools.

The program also seeks to emphasize the importance of the humanities as essential elements of a sound curriculum, recognize and reward outstanding teachers of the humanities, and help schools retain superior teachers.

Specifically on the fellowships themselves, the booklet continues:

The fellowships offer the opportunity for selected teachers to engage in eight weeks of concentrated independent study and thereby to expand their knowledge in areas that are of special interest to them and that are closely related to their teaching.

"Independent study" means self-directed reading and research undertaken largely without the assistance of course work. It does not mean that applicants to the program should not seek the assistance of others in designing a program of reading or scholarship. However, fellows will be expected to pursue their work in conformity to their own intellectual purpose and spirit and

principally on their own.

The fellow receives a stipend of $2,800, and the fellow's school receives $200 for the purchase of books that will be of value to students and other teachers.

In 1983 and in 1984, teachers were eligible to apply if they (a) had completed at least five years of full-time paid teaching in grades 9-12 in U.S. schools (including U.S. schools abroad); (b) held a master's degree or the equivalent (as defined by their school for the purposes of certification and salary); (c) carried a full teaching load (as defined by their school) with at least three-fifths of their schedule in English, foreign languages, history, or another humanities discipline; (d) were, or would be, under contract to teach full-time in a U.S. school (including those abroad) in the year following the fellowship; (e) had at least five years of service remaining before retirement; (f) had the capacity for independent study as demonstrated by previous accomplishments and as certified by the school principal; and (g) had not previously been awarded a fellowship for Independent Study in the Humanities.

A total of 97 fellowships were awarded in 1983 and an estimated 125 will be awarded in 1984. Since more than 1,000 teachers applied for the fellowships both in 1983 and in 1984, the odds of being selected as a recipient are about 1 in 10 which, I admit, may not be too encouraging. Based on my experience as a reviewer for the past two years, however, I conclude that about 30% of the applications are eliminated because individuals cannot read or follow directions, and another 30%, because they do not follow advice they give--or ought to give--to their own students. What I would offer any of you who may be interested in applying for a

fellowship, therefore, is a list of dos and don'ts; while these constitute my own personal advice and are not to be construed as those of either the Council for Basic Education or the National Endowment for the Humanities, and while many may appear to be self-evident, I would think that if you did follow them closely, you would improve your chances of being selected as a fellowship recipient. I cannot offer you any guarantees, of course: the competition will still be tough; but if I may use a truism, if you are going to spend time preparing an application, you had best be prepared to do the best job possible--precisely because the competition will be tough.

1. The entire proposal should be typed neatly and accurately. If necessary, pay a professional typist to prepare the final copy for you. A sloppily typed proposal with misspelled words, typographical errors, incomplete sentences, or penciled-in corrections or additions undermines your "seriousness of purpose." Remember that in the final selection process in particular, the difference between a proposal ranked 125th and one ranked 126th may be miniscule, and that a reviewer may indeed make his or her selection on the basis of this type of criterion.

2. The statement of purpose must be clear and concise. It is expected that outstanding humanities teachers are masters of the English language, and will know how to write a clear, concise, and coherent statement of purpose. Keep in mind, as well, that not all of the individuals who will review your application will have expertise in your field. Do not assume, therefore, that anyone else will understand your proposal, even if it is perfectly clear to you. As those of us in colleges and universities inevitably do when

submitting grant proposals or papers for publication, ask several of your colleagues to read your proposal before you prepare the final version--and ask them to do so with an extremely critical eye. In short, your colleagues ought to be your initial reviewers, and unless you can convince them that you have an excellent proposal, you will not likely convince the actual reviewers.

3. Considering the study projects of the 1983 fellows (a list is appended), your study topic can indeed be very broad and it can involve several disciplines--as long as it has a central focus.

For example, saying you wish to study 18th century German literature is fine; if you leave it at that, however, it will likely appear as an overly ambitious eight-week project. What specific aspect of 18th century German literature do you want to study, and why? Is it a specific genre or writer? If it is several writers, why have you specifically chosen them?

4. The application form does ask that you cite a bibliography of intended readings [an exception might be in the field of archaeology]. While the bibliography need not be complete, it should give the reviewers a clear indication that the intended readings will best help you accomplish your stated goal or purpose. That means you are going to have to do some preliminary research before you write your proposal. In other words, does your bibliography include some or most of the best known works on your proposed study topic or is it merely a random selection of titles?

5. Do not try to sell yourself as an expert or as the expert in the study area. One of the purposes of the program is to help you expand your horizons,

to allow you to read materials you have always wanted to read but for which you have never found the time; its purpose is not simply to allow you to review an area in which you already have considerable expertise.

6. For the same reason, while the study project must relate to your teaching assignments, it need not be limited specifically to the content of the courses you teach. Among the 1983 fellows, for example, were English teachers who studied the cultural life of Germany and Russia, the history of France, and contemporary Spanish American literature--all of which could help them better understand English and American literature. Foreign language teachers, in particular, might well expand their horizons by considering topics in comparative literature and culture.

7. It is hoped that the project will help you become a better teacher and, hence, help you improve the courses you now teach or allow you to develop new courses. Note, however, that the fellowships may not be used solely or primarily for the purpose of curriculum or materials development. Put another way, you should expect to spend the entire eight weeks on the independent study project. While the knowledge you gain and the notes you take may help you with curriculum or materials development, the latter should occur primarily after the study project has ended.

8. Also keep in mind that the application clearly and emphatically states that you may not use the stipend to develop new teaching methodologies nor to help you apply any particular methodology to your classroom. Your focus must be on a subject matter; for example, language as rhetoric, as semantics,

as history; literature; philosophy; comparative religions; the history or theory of the arts, etc.--not on "how to teach" language, literature or culture.

If you are interested in the computer, for example, a valid study might focus on what humanists, social scientists, and scientists have written in terms of the impact of the computer on contemporary society--not on how you can adapt the computer to your classroom.

9. Make sure your project is feasible in an eight-week period. You would have no difficulty convincing me, personally, that you could read fifty books in an eight-week period. You will have a problem, I believe, if you propose to spend 20-40 days traveling between one place and another while reading even ten books.

On the other hand, make sure it is a full eight-week study project and not something you would be able to accomplish by devoting a few hours to it "in the evenings" or "on weekends." My suggestion: make your project no less rigorous than the most rigorous college course you had. Whether that will involve extensive readings or a close analysis of a few works is, of itself, inconsequential--as long as what you intend to do is the most logical means of achieving your stated goal.

10. The instructions indicate that the independent study project can be undertaken in conjunction with course work at a college or university, as long as the latter is intended to supplement or support the independent study project--not be a substitute for it. In other words, your independent study readings or research must be in addition to and other than those/that

which will be assigned in any courses you take.

11. Pay particular attention to the "Activities and Achievements" section on the application, i.e., "major professional activities in which you regularly participate...other skills or accomplishments" such as "awards, special projects, and publications." While the initial reviewers do not see this information, I would expect it would be very helpful in the final screening process for two reasons: (a) it is the basis on which you establish your ability to do independent study; and (b) it is an indicator of the extent to which the knowledge you gain will be shared with other teachers (not just your own students), thus strengthening the humanities in general--one of the objectives of the fellowship program. Certainly, if you participate in professional meetings, e.g., by presenting sessions at conferences such as this, I would personally conclude that you would indeed be inclined to share the knowledge you gain with other teachers.

12. Give some special thought to the individual who must provide the evaluation of your performance as a classroom teacher--especially if you do not have a classroom supervisor. A colleague or best friend is not necessarily your best choice. After all, every application will likely be accompanied by two complimentary letters. A former student with whom you have kept in contact and who has gone on to pursue a career in your field or in a related field, or someone who has both observed you in the classroom and worked with you on committees or other professional activities may be able to write a more meaningful, if less flattering, statement than a close friend.

My last three points are directed primarily to my own colleagues in foreign languages.

13. If you want to study contemporary culture (so-called culture with a small "c"), make sure you know the difference between the humanities and the social sciences. While there is some overlap, our research tools and our focus are different. Certainly, you can go abroad to talk to people, conduct interviews or surveys, or to collect examples of popular culture--as long as these activities are of a totally secondary nature to your study project. Your primary aim, if your interest is culture, should be to read or to read about the history, literature, art, music or religion of the country or countries involved, and/or to do readings in the social sciences as long as such readings have a humanistic basis. Do not propose, as the focus of your study project, to perform the research of the sociologist, anthropologist or political scientist. Aside from the fact that no social scientist would expect to be able to do more than "scratch the surface" in eight weeks of study of a foreign culture, the National Endowment for the Humanities does not support social science research. With a few notable exceptions, e.g., archaeology, the primary research "tool" of the humanities is the library.

I might also point out here that William Bennett, Director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has openly and repeatedly been very critical of the whole concept of "cultural awareness" and similar social science jargon.

14. By the same token, make sure the project will indeed involve study,

not just busywork or tourist travel. Editing and compiling the slides you took on your last trip abroad does not involve study; nor does editing, compiling and/or taping a collection of foreign songs; nor does going abroad to take pictures of famous landmarks or to collect regalia.

15. If you do intend to spend all or part of the study period abroad, make sure you have a valid justification. Since the fellowships are intended for outstanding teachers, it is to be assumed that an outstanding foreign language teacher will already possess native or near-natively fluency in the language; consequently, going abroad solely or primarily to "brush up" on language skills will not satisfy the aims of the fellowship--even though improvement in language skills would occur.[3]

Likewise, the fact that you teach a foreign language or that you wish to study the history or literature of a foreign country does not, in itself, justify travel to that country. Yes, where else might you best study contemporary Spanish theatre than in Madrid or French theatre than in Paris--where you could attend performances while doing your independent study? And if your interest is Meso-American archaeology, you could certainly supplement your readings with on-site visits in Mexico and/or Guatemala. On the other hand, if you want to study colonial Spanish American history, your best bet might be the archives in Sevilla or the libraries at the University of California, Berkeley, or the University of Texas, Austin--not necessarily Mexico City or Bogotá.

Above all, if you do intend to do research abroad, make sure, as part of your preliminary research (before you write the proposal) that the research materials are indeed available and will be accessible to you.

Likewise, if you propose to interview writers or scholars (to supplement your independent study), make sure you establish beforehand that said individuals will indeed grant you an interview. No writer or scholar will accommodate you simply because you show up with an N.E.H. fellowship in hand.

Finally, before opening up the session to questions, let me simply read to you, as a kind of summary, the ten questions which the initial reviewers are asked to consider when evaluating the proposals:

1. Does the study fall within the humanities as defined by the National Endowment for the Humanities?
2. Is it independent?
3. Is it study?
4. Is it a plan for eight weeks of full-time study?
5. Is the plan feasible? (Is it overly ambitious for eight weeks? Have the arrangements for travel, courses, seminars, visits, and interviews been checked for feasibility?)
6. Does the study relate to the applicant's teaching assignments?
7. Is there a specific plan for the readings? Why has the applicant chosen these readings?
8. Will the applicant increase his or her knowledge of the humanities through this study?
9. If travel is involved, is it subordinate to and not a substitute for study?
10. Do all seminars, courses, visits, and interviews support the study, not replace it? Are they justified as to their relevance to the plan?

Notes

[1] This paper is an abstract of a session presented at the 1983 conference of the Washington Association of Foreign Language Teachers (Yakima, WA) and at the 1984 Southwest Regional Conference (Colorado Springs, CO).

[2] For example, the N.E.H. Summer Seminars for Secondary School Teachers.

[3] I should point out that the National Endowment for the Humanities "does not support acquisition of basic skills," which would include acquisition of foreign language skills.

INDEPENDENT STUDY IN THE HUMANITIES. Summer Fellowships for High School Teachers

Applications for 1984 Fellowships will be available in October 1983. Write to:

Independent Study in the Humanities
P.O. Box 2915
Princeton NJ 08541.

Subject of study of 1983 Fellowship Recipients. (Teaching field of recipient)

- The history and criticism of European art from 1880 to 1940 with emphasis on painting and its relationship to film (English and Art).
- The writings by and about five presidents of the U.S. (English).
- The poetry of John Milton and the critical estimates of his work (English and Foreign Language).
- Russian history (Foreign Language).
- Political themes in Virgil's Aeneid (English).
- Modern Spanish culture, with an emphasis on developments since the passing of Franco (Foreign Language).
- France in the Middle Ages (Foreign Language).
- The Anglo-American concept of justice (History and Philosophy).
- Cicero and Ovid (History and Foreign Language).
- Literary themes in the works of the Classical Age of Greece and in the Neo-Classical period of England and France (English).
- Selected French writers on political philosophy (Foreign Language).
- The religion and culture of Asia with emphasis on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam (History, Philosophy, Religion, and Ethics).
- The works of three French poets: Rimbaud, Apollinaire, and Cesaire (Foreign Language).
- American history since World War II with an emphasis on the Cold War, politics, counter-cultures and civil rights (History)
- Mythology in Homer's Odyssey and in the Old Testament (English).
- African and South American literature since 1960 (English).
- Western philosophical thought from Plato to Nietzsche (History and World Religions).
- The effects of industrialization on twon life in New England during the nineteenth century (History).
- Contemporary American poetry (English).
- Literature and art depicting the city of Chicago and of architecture in Chicago (English).
- The effects of the Darwinian revolution on turn-of-the-century literature, art, philosophy, and music (English).
- Selected American poetrs from 1940-1970 (English and Foreign Language).
- The history, literature, and language of France during the Renaissance (Foreign Language).
- Reform movements in Illinois from 1830-1860 (History).
- The figure of Satan in myth and literature (English).
- The English novel since Austen (English).
- Selected works of English literature with an emphasis on writers whose main subject is human relationships (English).
- The poetry of Mexico and the associated literary criticism (English).
- The history and literature of settlement in the Great Plains from 1860-1890 (History).
- The history of the English language, contemporary short fiction, music, and art (English).
- Selected Mexican-American and Mexican writers of poetry and short fiction (English and Foreign Language).
- The history and literature of the American South and of twentieth-century Boston (English).
- The mythology in Japanese, Chinese, and Polynesian folklore (English, Art and Philosophy).
- The spoken dialect of Somerset County, Maryland (English).
- World War I as a turning point in the cultural life of Russia and Germany (English).
- Russian history as viewed through the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (History).
- The life and work of El Greco (Foreign Language).
- The French presence in Maryland from 1755 to 1805 (Foreign Language).
- The rhetoric of scientific and technical discourse (English).
- Roman art and architecture as revealed by archeological research (Foreign Language).
- The relationship of music to social, political, and economic aspects of European and American culture (History).
- Selected twentieth-century French writers (Foreign Language).
- Readings in Marx and Engels (English and History).
- The writings of Ana María Matute (Foreign Language).
- The thematic relationships between novels written by black Americans and classic novels of earlier American and European periods (English and Drama).
- Medieval and Renaissance architecture (History).
- Early black and native American literature (English).
- The role of metaphor in literary criticism (English).
- The use of landscapes in nineteenth century british novels (English).
- Social concerns reflected in French theatre since 1945 (Foreign Language).
- Selected plays of William Shakespeare (English).
- The history of Lorraine as a microcosm of European history (English).
- The idea of freedom and the concept of human rights in eighteenth-century French literature (Foreign Language).
- Selected plays of Shakespeare and related literary criticism (English).
- Style in classical rhetoric and its implications for English composition (English).
- The Arthurian legend, with an emphasis on the history and facts of the late Roman period in Britain (English).
- Selected modern writers of Latin America (English).

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- The interactions between traditional Navajo culture and Modern American life (History).
- Roman art and history (Foreign Language).
- The effects of non-violent political action in America (History).
- Recents developments in the scholarship of Roman civilization and Latin (English and Foreign Language).
- Selected major works of European writers in four historical periods and a survey of Asian literature (English).
- The differing uses of mythology in the cultures of Hispanic, Native American, and Anglo ethnic groups (English).
- Selected themes in works by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Machiavelli, and Marx (History).
- The origins and evolution of Japanese industrialization from pre-Meiji times to the present (History).
- Selected aspects of the experience and influence of Italian immigrants in the United States (History).
- American painting, sculpture, and architecture and their relation to American literature (English).
- Selectei French and German writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century (Foreign Language).
- The fiction of Walker Percy (English).
- Literary viewpoints on the status of American women from 1950 to 1980 (English).
- Selected twentieth-century Mexican writers of fiction (Foreign Language).
- The interaction of Christianity and pagan religions in the fourth century (History).
- Ancient Jewish history (History).
- Mythological archetypal patterns in literature (English).
- Black literature and music with emphasis on the development and use of spoken dialect (History).
- The modern literature of southern African nations, with an emphasis on racial differences since the colonial era (English).
- The history of northern New York State in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812 (History).
- The work of Ana María Matute and other Spanish women novelists of the Generation of 1945 (Foreign Language).
- The historical background of the Bible (English).
- The effects of three recently developed advanced technologies on the culture of contemporary France (Foreign Language).
- The intellectual history of the Middle Ages (English).
- The literature of Puerto Rico since World War II (English).
- Southern fiction from 1920 to 1945 (English).
- Contemporary French culture (Foreign Language).
- Selected nineteenth and twentieth-century European writers of fiction (English).
- Ancient and medieval architecture and towns in England (History and Art).
- Art, music, dance, and drama in relation to rhetoric (English).
- The roles of women, both black and white, in the development of the southeastern U.S. (History).
- Art and architecture in the museums and buildings of seven U.S. cities (History).
- The influence of the baroque in colonial Mexican culture (English).
- The culture of Quebec, especially its literature, music, and folklore, and its influence in the state of Vermont (Foreign Language).
- The recent history of the German Democratic Republic (Foreign Language).
- Selected Spanish poets, novelists, and dramatists (Foreign Language).
- Common themes and symbols in Eastern and Western mythology (English).
- The cultural history of the Haida Indians, a northwestern coastal people (History).
- The effects of the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans on the people of Puyallup, Washington (History).
- Diaries, family histories, and letters from the early decades of Wisconsin history (History and Foreign Language).

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